

February 22, 2022

Dear members of the Appropriations Committee,

I would first like to thank you for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to represent the incredible student entrepreneurs of UConn. The General Committee has been gracious to support UConn and I hope to see that support continue.

My name is Allie Davenport and I was born and raised in Litchfield, Connecticut. I am a sophomore at the University of Connecticut studying finance and cognitive science. My parents were both first generation college students and met at UConn. Ironically, I never envisioned myself attending here; I wanted to blaze my own path. Covid began when I was months away from high school graduation and faced with decisions regarding my future. Amidst the financial chaos and disruption of a pandemic, I came to the conclusion that UConn had the best return on investment. I would receive a great education for a fraction of the cost.

Having spent three semesters here, I know I made the best decision by studying at this university. UConn is unique in that, despite the large student population, there are countless ways to find your small pockets of people. I am a deeply curious academic at heart and have enjoyed the intellectually challenging courses thus far. My favorite experience at the university has to be my involvement with the Peter J. Werth Institute for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. Werth Institute serves as the connective tissue for entrepreneurship at UConn and has been the vessel in which I can experiment entrepreneurially.

During my first year, I was involved in a competitive pilot cohort called Freshman Female Founders. I have expanded my network exponentially, gained marketable skill sets, and received seed funding to launch my own business called StarMind (mystarmind.com). Inspired by the starfish and its unique ability to regenerate damaged limbs, StarMind is a self-development company aimed to shift perspectives and celebrate small wins. This symbolism of growth and renewal through hardship directly relates to my mindset journal, The Guide. I designed it from scratch, partnered with a domestic manufacturer, and launched in early November of 2021. I have sold over 600 units of product thus far. A new bulk order of The Guide is currently in production and I'm working on a few collaborative events with other UConn mental health startups.

Some of my closest friends and fellow Werth Innovators are saving the bees, reforming the edtech industry with augmented reality flashcards, building exoskeletons, and launching tech startups. If you lumped together all of our sales revenue, conversion rates, and article features, it may look impressive. Personally, I am most proud of the intangible lessons learned along the way that have shaped our trajectories as individuals.

I am not sure if I would be calling myself a young founder had I not attended UConn. I have been observing what the Werth Institute is cultivating through curriculum, programs, and experiential learning models. In doing so, I realize that the curriculum of "elite" colleges feels archaic when compared to the innovation erupting at the Werth Institute. At UConn, if you are willing to put in the work and own your experience, you will blaze a uniquely beautiful path.

An investment in UConn is an investment in the future of innovation. On behalf of student entrepreneurs like myself, we are grateful for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Allie Davenport